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OCI NO. 1592/65

6 May 1965

## MEMORANDUM

Viet Cong Order of Battle Holdings

1. In his Military Report covering the week of 24 April - 1 May, the Commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV) submitted a summary of the latest Order of Battle holdings on Viet Cong strength in South Vietnam, which includes for the first time a joint estimate agreed on by J2, MACV and J2, South Vietnamese (ARVN) High Command. The estimate is dated 31 March and the holdings are being disseminated in a new joint OB book, reportedly scheduled for distribution about 1 May, but not yet received in Washington.

2. Initial word that the new joint estimate was being prepared was reported in COMUSMACV's Military Report for the week ending 24 April. In the same report, a summary of J2, MACV's then confirmed OB holdings were provided, but it was noted that the new joint estimate would supercede all previous OB books produced by J2 MACV or J2 ARVN. A comparison of regular force strength and units as submitted in the earlier MACV OB and the current joint estimate follows:

	<u>J2 MACV</u> <u>24 April</u>	<u>MACV/ARVN</u> <u>1 May</u>
Regimental Headquarters	5	9
Battalions	54	61
Separate Companies	142	188
Separate Platoons	35	114
Field Hospital	1	
 Total Combat Main Force Personnel	 39,000	 47,000

JCS review(s) completed.

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3. The new combat figure of 47,000 in the joint estimate excludes an estimated 17,600 men who are headquarters staff personnel, or technical, commo-liaison, transportation, corridor, reconnaissance, and guard personnel. The new battalion figure of 61 includes the recent acceptance in South Vietnam of the 2nd Battalion, 101st Regiment, 325th PAVN (North Vietnamese) Division in Kontum Province.

4. Although no accompanying details on the updating of the OB were provided by COMUSMACV in his latest Military Report, it is apparent that MACV has brought its own OB holdings, generally presented in the form of confirmed unit and troop strength based on rigid acceptance criteria, into line with ARVN J2 holdings, which have consistently been larger. ARVN J2 OB holdings have for the past few years been considered valid by MACV advisers at the corps and sector levels, and have generally been the basis of operational planning on the government side. Furthermore, the new total strength figure in the joint estimate coincides with J2 MACV's recent holdings on probable Viet Cong main force strength, as opposed to confirmed strength, and appears to represent primarily an adjustment to an agreed US/South Vietnamese figure for operational purposes. We have received some previous information that MACV was preparing to accept the presence in South Vietnam of three to five Viet Cong regimental headquarters in addition to the five which have been confirmed since 1963. Normal MACV reporting in the past few weeks has in fact referred on several occasions to Viet Cong regiments or battalions not carried on MACV's confirmed OB holdings, but evidently accepted as probably in place.

5. At the present time, we lack information from COMUSMACV as to whether the new joint estimate represents only confirmed unit strength, and whether in addition to the 47,000 there are other "probable" and "unconfirmed" figures. In the past, confirmed units have included only those whose presence and designation has been identified from at least two separate Viet Cong prisoners or documents, or a combination thereof. The criteria for acceptance of a unit by ARVN J2 has been less rigid, taking into account at least some evidence of a unit's presence from engagement in actual combat. MACV's confirmation of the PAVN battalion in Kontum, however, was based on the interrogation of one defector [redacted] plus subsequent combat contact. Clarification of the criteria for the new joint estimates of

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combat strength and units is being sought from the field, and details presumably will also be available when the new Order of Battle books are received.

6. Although MACV has in the past carried in its OB breakdown figures for Viet Cong headquarters personnel, this is the first time that a firm distinction has been made between combat and non-combat strength figures. We believe that many of the 17,600 personnel now carried in the non-combat category, and excluded from the 47,000 figure, represent troops involved in operation and protection of the infiltration corridor from North Vietnam, through Laos, and into South Vietnam. Prisoners have reported that a regiment is involved in this "transportation-corridor" function, partly subordinate to the PAVN High Command. In addition, at least two battalions subordinate to the Viet Cong's Military Region 5 command in the northern part of South Vietnam, are reported to have the role of operating the infiltration corridor as far south as Kontum Province. There are apparently similar units responsible for extending these "communication-liaison" operations into southern South Vietnam.

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Approved For Release 2003/07/30 : CIA-RDP79T00472A000700030007-2

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